

Who am I? Well I am a teacher, that is something that has begun to sink in in the last few months and it is something I have come to identify with when I think about that question. It was not until I sat down to write this that that really clicked, but it has fundamentally become a part of who I am and how I want to project myself to my peers and those around me. It is intrinsically me and it always has been. I can recall early on as was a freshman here when we were asked to reflect on what makes us teachers or why we want to be teachers and I would offer up my response in the form of my most expertly crafted five paragraph essay format that I was taught so diligently in school saying that I always liked teaching people things, how much I really enjoyed school, and how I cared about my content area and wanted to share that with my students.

I should hope these things are true, but they only really scratch the surface, they are only the superficial role of a teacher. I am a teacher because I want to do something important. I want to make a difference. I want to wake up every morning and know I am going to be doing something profoundly significant without having to convince myself that it is so. I want to be engaged in a pursuit that I could never give less than my best. I want to make people's lives better by teaching them how it is that they can know that they matter and how to show everyone around them that is it so. I will teach so that those who learn from me know what it is to be free and how to protect that most fundamental human right. I will teach because I want to make my country greater and I know that that must start with making my students find their greatness. I want to teach because I know that I will never be satisfied with leaving anything less than a profound impact on those people that I teach.

Social studies exists in a rather strange content spectrum, it is constantly both commended and dismissed for the breadth of the content area. To the unfamiliar social studies can seem like an entirely overwhelming and intimidating concentration. As one comes to understand the content more fully it begins to blend together much more, to the point where it becomes ostensibly inseparable. As a fully initiated social studies adherent it becomes less about what subject area I will teach and more about teaching understanding. At least that is the way I have come to see it. When I think about social studies I think about each instance where the content was treated as isolated instances that existed in a complete vacuum where they never had the definitive and indelible impact they truly have on each other. World history, economics, sociology, anthropology, or any specialized area of history do not exist independent of each other, they each have a powerful relationship where they all influence each other.

Looking at combining these content areas that are often separated by some constructed false dichotomy creates a much more profound learning experience where students can learn the core tenants of economics, anthropology, and sociology. An educator can create a curriculum where students are able to learn about any part of history past or present and immediately have an intrinsic understanding of the motivations and implications of such events without ever having to drill them with why they ought to know such an instance and why it is significant, they can make their own very involved and educated inference through what they already know.

This is what I want to teach, I choose to teach understanding, the ability to make abstract inferences through application of the material I have taught. I choose not to teach history or economics or anthropology, or even social studies, because the separate these philosophies into

subgroups does little but soften their combined impact. Collectively they can mean so much and teach so much, but separated they become contrived, convoluted, and confounding.

I have consistently wanted to develop a student and discussion based curriculum for a course of my own after a profoundly effective class I was enrolled in in my senior year of high school. My instructor was very passive throughout most of the course and acted as a constant facilitator that kept us on track and provided clarification. Similarly I have wanted to conduct a high order class where my students practice inquiry and discussion to uncover content through a highly active and student lead process.

While I am fully aware of how tedious lecture can become I have always really enjoyed a well-developed and executed one can be, I think some of my best learning actually happens during lecture. I am fairly confident that I can make a lecture at least somewhat more engaging considering I can be a very animated and dynamic speaker. At the same time I have to be cognizant that lecture can often leave the highest risk students behind, so I will need to be careful of how I deploy the tactic.

For a large part of my class I plan on employing a considerable amount of cooperative learning where my students will work in tandem with one another and refine their thoughts, questions, and answers through peer analysis and feedback before finally expanding their thoughts to the rest of the class for final polishing. I really want to emphasize the process of reflection and refinement that goes into both learning and writing. My students will be responsible for making the transition into a track where they continue to improve their diction and delivery, and their structure and ability to express their thoughts and ideas eloquently on paper.

I have always been certain that I want to teach a high caliber of student, but what I think will be the absolute most rewarding teaching experience would be to take a group of students that had been thrust into a low achievement track and fostering considerable growth to the point where they can achieve beyond what anyone had previously thought they were capable of would be a profoundly rewarding undertaking. It is my hope that I can take a student at any readiness level and transform them into a student who achieves beyond what they thought they could.

Unfortunately, I cannot really see my background helping me as a social studies teacher. History, geography, economics, and the numerous other subjects that can be found under the umbrella of social studies all came very naturally to me. I never experienced growing up without new clothes at the beginning of each year or food in the cupboards when I was hungry. My parents always took an interest in how my day went and what I learned in school, they always insisted in looking over my homework every night despite exasperated assurances suggesting otherwise. Much of the reason social studies came so naturally to me though was likely because of the passion and enthusiasm I brought with me to each class. I genuinely cared about what I was learning and want to bring that same passion into my classroom each day. As a social studies teacher what I really hope to be able to bring to the classroom is a detailed understanding of the world directly surrounding my students, along with the extended world. While I know I cannot expect my students to read the newspaper and watch the news every night, one of my primary goals as a teacher is to get my students to have a working understanding of the current social and political issues that our country is wrapped up in. I consider an understanding of these topics to be entirely critical to live in and participate in a democracy that functions smoothly and as it should. Staying uninformed about the trajectory of our nation can only send us, as an entire country off course and prevent us from righting ourselves.

However this is not to say that my philosophy was never shaped by earlier experiences in my life. I have always been a voracious reader, but from middle school and onwards I perpetually possessed a series of books on my person. Most commonly I would be engrossed in the writings of Kurt Vonnegut, who is still to this day my favorite author. Vonnegut's fiercely humanistic personal philosophy left an indelible mark on my own personal philosophy. Vonnegut's writings on human dignity and goodness in the face of the most catastrophic and tragic circumstances and pragmatic outlook made a tremendous impact that has never left me and continued to shape my own teaching philosophy.

Personally as a philosophical humanist myself I immediately gravitated towards humanism as a teaching philosophy because of my parallel belief with Vonnegut that we as humans are good and capable of wonderful things, and that if we work as an empathetic community that we can achieve so much more together and possess a much more rich education than we could otherwise.

Above all I consider myself a pragmatic person, which has left a significant impact on my professional persona as an educator. Teaching is certainly a dynamic profession with an enormous range of stimuli and responses that occur throughout the course of a single day of teaching it seems an exercise in folly to limit your own responses as an educator to a few blanket responses that I can find in the school's handbook. As an instructor I am here to teach my students and they are here to learn, and that always has to come first. The implications and motivations of every instance of behavior need to be weighed heavily before a decision can be made. Students act and react both negatively and positively for a wide array of reasons. To ignore this motivational depth is to ignore this student's development and their unique needs.

The impact I want to see my philosophy have on my classroom is relatively straight forward. I want my teaching philosophy to manifest itself as a highly cooperative learning environment that is built around mutual respect between students and between myself and my students. Because my students will need to work cooperatively when they enter the work force I want to foster this skill early on within a democratic setting, so that my students can prepare themselves for adulthood when they must integrate themselves into a cooperative and democratic society. While it may seem counter intuitive to the goal of cooperation, I want to achieve collaboration between my students by encouraging individualism among my students. I personally want my students to be able to see each other and distinct and unique individuals with their own strengths and weaknesses, their own likes and dislikes. I want to build a classroom with a core of students who are deeply familiar with each other so that they can support each other and achieve far greater results as a whole.

Physically I would like to set my classroom up in clusters to foster collaboration and cooperative learning opportunities. As I mentioned earlier the goal here is to have students familiarize themselves with the process revision and self-reflection. Ideally the class can begin work on constructing an idea individually or in pairs, where they can then sharpen their thoughts against the responses offered by their peers within their cluster before the final level of revision before the entire class. Equally I believe that the clusters will facilitate more rich discussions within the classroom, which I hope will be a major feature within my classroom's learning setting.

Lesson plans will typically be developed with as many learners as I can manage in mind. However it is my firm belief that to keep a student engaged every now and then it is important to construct a lesson tailor specifically for them where they can shine and feel like a valuable

member of the class, especially if they might sometimes feel otherwise. As I have lesson planned and tested my plans in numerous cases of trial by fire I have come to learn to steer myself away from lesson plans that present themselves too linearly. Early on I found myself trying to develop complex lessons that would hinge on my students asking specific questions, or specific interests, but when these factors do not appear in the classroom (and they often do not), it can feel as though you have hit an insurmountable obstacle. From this practice I have altered my planning to function in a much more dynamic and open ended setting to prevent such instances where the class might grind to a halt.

I would like to think that my curriculum alone can motivate my students, but I fully understand that that is rather unrealistic. As an educator with a pragmatic outlook concerning the practice of teaching I consider a democratic environment to be a key concept towards creating a dynamic and effective learning environment. Equally a democratic classroom can help my students to take ownership of the day-to-day activities and course of each lesson. Ideally my students will get to choose many of the assignments that they do, hopefully ensuring that they are able to apply the content knowledge that they develop in the class into something that they are genuinely interested in.

Similarly I want to keep my students motivated to not only complete their work and assignments happily and at a high caliber, but I want them to do the same with the rules and expectations and the classroom, which I would like to develop class-by-class through a democratic process. I have absolute faith that my students are levelheaded enough to possess a solid understanding of what good behavior is. If my students can develop their own guidelines to follow within my classroom they are sure to take them more seriously as the democratic and student led process should eliminate any rules that may seem arbitrary to them and prevent any

unnecessary conversations concerning the nature of a particular rule, and ideally minimizing negative behavior, which then leaves more time to instruction. Instruction that they have hopefully had a hand in designing.

The most important aspect of assessment to me is that it be on going to generate a step by step map of student development and improvement, and to provide the most accurate and up to date picture of how well each student is doing. Assessment can be used to capture an understanding of where each of my students are and where they need to be through pre-assessment. To me pre-assessment represents one of the most indispensable tools I have at my disposal as an educator. I can encourage a dialogue and rapport between my students and myself as much as possible but there will still be students that will not feel comfortable sharing any struggles they might be having with the material. With students like this a quiz or a test is can sometimes be the only way that difficulty can be expressed, often times these assignments can be weighted heavily and performing poorly on a single one can put a student back considerably.

By keeping assessment on going and low stakes will help me see where students are finding difficulty with their work, and allow me to scaffold and reinforce those areas to the point where they no longer become an issue without setting my students back from a weighty failing grade that could cause some of my students to become discouraged. Furthermore ongoing assessment helps to battle any other discouragement that can occur in the classroom. By possessing a comprehensive collection of student artifacts that can show students their own development over the course of the year. It may be easy to become discouraged in the face of a large or difficult assignment, but it becomes somewhat harder when each student has their very own record of their improvement throughout the year to encourage themselves with.

I firmly believe that to keep students motivated and engaged in the classroom they need a multitude of texts to keep the content from becoming stale and boring, which can happen all too easily when only a single textbook is used. By blending numerous different texts, from primarily and secondary sources, to fictional novels and works of art concerning the topic, as well as a traditional textbook students will have a much more varied perspective that will leave them much more capable of seeing the broader implications of our topic of study and possibly lead them to reading something they might actually enjoy.

The focus of my classroom will ultimately to create citizens who are capable of living in a modern democratic society, which will make my students responsible for being aware of what is happening around them currently in their country. Ideally I would like my students to have a working understanding of what is happening around them in their government and other global issues that concern the United States. Such topics are more easily integrated into an economics or politics course, however my aim is to blend these current concerns into any class that I might teach. I am still polishing the concept but I want to make students responsible for becoming well versed in national and world wide news. Depending on how often the class meets and what their work load might be I may alter my assignments but I would like to see my students reading and watching the news. The details are still unclear, but I could possibly assign a student each class or week to report on a significant news story to the class, alternatively they could conduct their own individual research on a story and follow up with the traditional think, pair, share method. Students could generate their own thoughts and responses to the news story, or even write a brief response if it becomes necessary, or they need a physically written aid to help organize their thoughts. Students could sharpen their thoughts off peers before finally sharing with the class. Either way the class will feature a strong emphasis on becoming acquainted with the regular

happenings across the nation and the world that young adult need to be aware of to take an active and positive role in our country.

When I do make my way into a school I hope to leave a significant impact on the other educators, and help encourage any teachers who might have become disenchanted with the practice find their joy in the profession once again. Similarly it would be a tremendous honor to become one of the leaders in helping my school transition into compliance with the forthcoming legislation that is going to make a sizable impression on the surface of teaching in this country.

Most of all I would certainly like to endear myself to a distinguished veteran teacher who can help me get on my feet as a first year teacher, though helping me revise and improve my lessons and offer feedback to help me develop year-by-year into a distinguished teacher in my own right. Eventually I would hope to take a similar role in helping first year and pre-service teachers find their brilliance and creativity. Above all what I really desire as a teacher is to give it my all and leave a profoundly positive impact on people. If I can do that much I think I will have found something that I will never want to give up.